

**Agricultural Advisory Committee Meeting  
April 16, 2019 Minutes**

**Attendance:** Linda Lewis, Michele Cropp, Leonard Yourman, Peter Driscoll, Jane Evans, Aliza Silver, Ben Allnutt, Chuck Schuster, Doug Lechliden, Ben Butler

**Staff:** Jeremy Criss

**Agenda items are in bold and minutes are not bolded.**

1. **Call the Meeting to Order and Introductions: 7:03 PM.**
2. **Approval of the AAC meeting minutes from March 19, 2019:** Approved as written.  
(Evans/Cropp)
3. **The House Bill 20 and Senate Bill 344 passed, and the Governor must sign for final approval. We hope to have a way of collecting portions of State Agricultural Transfer Taxes. Moving forward developers will no longer be exempt from paying the State Agricultural Transfer Tax and at they will have to pay a minimum of 35% of the State Agricultural Transfers. (First year-100% Second year-50% and Third year and beyond-35%.)**

If the governor signs the bill, then OAG plans to help other counties with tracking these properties. It can be tough, since, for example, the land records do not always include the consideration, when the property went from an ag use assessment to a different assessment. If a developer chooses to use the loophole and reduce the amount of state transfer tax they must pay, they will get benefits in years 1 and 2, but will have to pay 35% in year 3 and beyond. The tracking system will have to be GIS based.

4. **There are several projects in the development phase for Farm Alcohol Production Facilities in both Up and Down County areas. I am also hearing how some farmers are agreeing to contract growing of specialty crops for the owners of these facilities. The Office of Agriculture believes contract growing of specialty crops will expand moving forward representing opportunities for farmers. The OAG will prepare a Biannual Report on the status of Farm Alcohol Production and the OAG has been asked by the County Executive to draft an Executive Regulation to implement Farm Alcohol Production.**

The county is already seeing folks growing specialty crops for farm alcohol production. Angie McNally will be growing lemon grass to be added to beer. Song Dog Distillery in Rockville uses special varieties of corn for their distilled spirits grown by Todd Greenstone. Elder Pine grows hops for beer. There are more and more examples coming soon.

5. **We are still waiting for the next Agritourism Study Advisory Committee-ASAC follow up meeting. In response to a request from the OAG, Gwen Wright said that MNCPPC is retooling this project?**

Bob Cissel emailed Josh Penn and the members of the advisory committee, stating that it has been a while since they last met in November, when they provided responses to the consultant's report. P&P is gathering those responses together so that the committee can review them. Bob asked for an update on the progress. Jane Siegler replied to all echoing for an update and adding that she emailed Josh Penn on March 14 asking for an update. Jeremy forwarded the messages to Gwen Wright, the Director of P&P and Fred Boyd, the Area 3 Planning Supervisor as well as Rich Weaver, the Division Chief, and copying Josh. He was asking Gwen for an update. She said that P&P is "retooling the project."

To this point, the committee has only agreed to two things: 1) not to endorse House Bill 252 (2018) which created a statewide agritourism definition that was too broad (would include Frisbee golf, paintball, ziplining) – the open space members of the committee agreed, and; 2) the questions that would be asked of any applicant that wants to engage in ag tourism.

There is a concern that P&P is going to attempt to take ag tourism backwards and make it restrictive in the County.

- 6. The Sugarland Broadband Pilot construction along Partnership Road is completed and electric service hook ups are underway. Comcast is waiving the installation costs to the residents including the long runs up their driveways for hooking up the service. Comcast is now working to schedule construction along the Sugarland Road. There will be a ribbon cutting ceremony at some point.**

<https://montgomerycountymd.gov/cable/Sugarland/sugarland-comcast.html> The County has applied to the USDA for grant funding to expand broadband into the Agricultural Reserve. Several Ag Reserve residents have expressed interest to assist in replicating the success of the Sugarland Pilot into other areas of the Agricultural Reserve.

Phase I is completed. The power has been hooked up and all those people in phase I should have their service by this Friday. OAG has decided to slow down the ribbon cutting until everyone is hooked up. The last holdout is the property adjacent to Dave Weitzer' property and his daughters family needs the broadband for their homework.

Right now they are focusing on Phase II. Phase III will capture the seven residents in the Bud Road/Hughes Road area to connect into the service that's coming out of Poolesville. There are a few property owners in this area that have refused to sign the easement that will help neighbors get connected. Comcast is looking at what the cost would be to dig and put the fiber underground.

- 7. Update on the FY19 1.5% Savings Plan for the OAG totals \$14,583. The Savings Plan will delay the date of payments of matching grants the OAG will be able to provide through June 30, 2019 in addition to reducing our marketing outreach for farmers markets and the farm tour. Update on the FY20 Budget Reduction for the OAG totals \$34,000. The County Executive accepted the OAG recommendation to reduce the Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation-MAEF and Montgomery County Public Schools-MCPS by \$34,000. This reduction will reduce the number of days the Mobile Science Lab-Food Fiber and You can visit the schools from 129 days down to 48 days. The PHED Committee Work Session is May**

**1, 2019. The OAG has reached out to the Edward Byrd Family Foundation to see if they could backfill the reduced General Fund and restore the contract.**

In addition to the general fund source, OAG also has \$361,902 from the water quality protection charge funds, which goes to the soil conservation district for 2.10 FTEs and from the capital fund is 2.25 FTEs. The total 8.5 FTEs for the OAG total \$961,373. There is a council fed committee work session on May 1<sup>st</sup> at 1 pm on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of the Council building. Michele, Chuck, and Lonny Luther will be there. The MAEF Lab may be put on the reconciliation list, so it would be good to have strong attendance in the audience.

The recommended reduction for OAG is \$33,473 (4% reduction). Last year the MAEF Lab visited 27 schools. If the reduction is approved that number will be reduced to 14 schools for FY20. The number of days the lab visited schools in FY19 was 127 days, which would have to be reduced to 48 days in FY20.

**8. On Tuesday March 12, 2019, the County Council held a continental breakfast for farmers to attend and then participate with a County Council Proclamation to celebrate National Agriculture Day. This was a well-attended event with over 30 farmers attending and several council members came to the breakfast to talk with farmers.**

At our last meeting, we requested for letters of appreciation to be submitted. Jeremy sent them to the three sponsors of the proclamation and their staff.

**9. U.S. Senator Ben Cardin had to cancel the round table discussion with County farmers on Monday April 15, 2019 at 11:00. We will reschedule this event once we have heard back from the Senator's staff. Please see the attached program-agenda for this event.**

The Ben Cardin event had to be canceled, but Jeremy included the agenda in our meeting packet. Jeremy was going to thank the Senator for his recommendation in early March to the Trump administration about H2B workers.

Mitsuko Herrera of the County Department of Technology Systems is preparing applications to USDA for grants for broadband in the Ag Reserve and would include a discussion of the Sugarland Road project.

**10. Additional Items**

- a. Tomorrow are interviews for two new non-farmer candidates. Jeremy will make recommendations to Executive staff and then full recommendations will be presented to Marc Elrich for the folks who have requested new terms.
- b. Jeremy has asked OAG staff to draft a letter from Michele Cropp, the president of the Montgomery County Farm Bureau, inviting Elrich to Linda Lewis' farm and to meet the 19 residents who want the improvements to River Rd. Michele sent the letter.
- c. Industrial Hemp
  - i. HB 1123. This enabled the legislative intent of the 2018 Farm Bill to create a different environment for growing hemp. Today you have to partner with an institution of higher

learning to do so. The application at MDA still asks about partnering with UMD. This will change when the HB 1123 regulations are promulgated.

- ii. In Montgomery County, one person has applied to grow industrial hemp. Another is contemplating it. Chuck posed questions about how you measure the amount of THC and when and at what part of the plant do you test for that value? A lot of still ambiguous. Farmers are having trouble determining these things.
  - d. Ag Census – yesterday OAG got the 2017 ag census. Montgomery County went from 540 farms to 558. We went from 63,493 acres to 65,537 acres in farms. The total market value of ag products sold went from \$48 million to \$42 million. Jeremy will have an updated fact sheet for us at the May meeting.
  - e. Jeremy finished the 2018 Ag Advisory Committee Annual Report.  
[https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/agservices/Resources/Files/AAC\\_Meetings/ANNUAL\\_REPORTS/2018%20Annual%20Report.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/agservices/Resources/Files/AAC_Meetings/ANNUAL_REPORTS/2018%20Annual%20Report.pdf)
  - f. A speaker from Bayer will come to speak at the OAG offices on June 14<sup>th</sup> at 9 am to talk about the 40-year safety record of Glyphosate.
  - g. The new equine conservation manager will be announced soon.
- 11. Adjournment:** 8:28 PM. (Cropp/Driscoll)